

Abelterium: Geometric Mosaics from the Villae of Casa da Medusa and Quinta do Pião

Abelterium: Casa da Medusa Villası ve Quinta do Pião'nun Geometrik Mozaikleri

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(Received 21 December 2016, accepted after revision 23 June 2017)

Abstract

The study of geometric mosaics from Casa da Medusa and Quinta do Pião has made a significant contribution towards understanding both the decorative project of these villae in Abelterium (Alter do Chão) and the Roman presence in this region. Geometric pavements in varying states of preservation were uncovered in several rooms. These are essentially polychrome mosaics, some displaying evidence of Baroque overdoing, consisting of white, ochre, yellow, pink, red, green, blue and grey tesserae, made from limestone, sandstone, marble and eventually from pottery.

Keywords: *Abelterium, villae, Medusa, mosaics, geometric.*

Öz

Casa da Medusa ve Quinta do Pião'dan geometrik desenli mozaikler üzerinde yapılan çalışmalar, Abelterium'daki (Alter do Chão) bu villaların dekoratif projesini ve bu bölgedeki Roma varlığını anlamada önemli katkılar sağlamaktadır. Farklı derecelerde korunmuş olan geometrik desenli mozaikler pek çok odada ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bunlar esasen polikrom mozaikler olup, bazıları Barok etkisini gösteren kireçtaşı, kumtaşı, mermer ve çanak çömlek kırıklarından yapılmış, beyaz, koyu sarı, sarı, pembe, kırmızı, yeşil, mavi ve gri renklerdeki tesseralardan oluşmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Abelterium, villalar, Medusa, mozaik, geometrik.*

1. Introduction

Casa da Medusa and Quinta do Pião are two important *villae* in Roman *Lusitania* (Fig. 1) in which Roman mosaics were identified, which are part of the research project on *Abelterium* (Alter do Chão), undertaken under the scientific coordination of the author.

Whilst it has yet to be confirmed whether Casa da Medusa (Figs. 2-7) was effectively an urban or suburban *villa*, since the boundaries of *Abelterium* are unknown, Quinta do Pião, which lies about 6 km southeast of *Abelterium*, was magnificent and vast, as characteristic of large Imperial *villae*.

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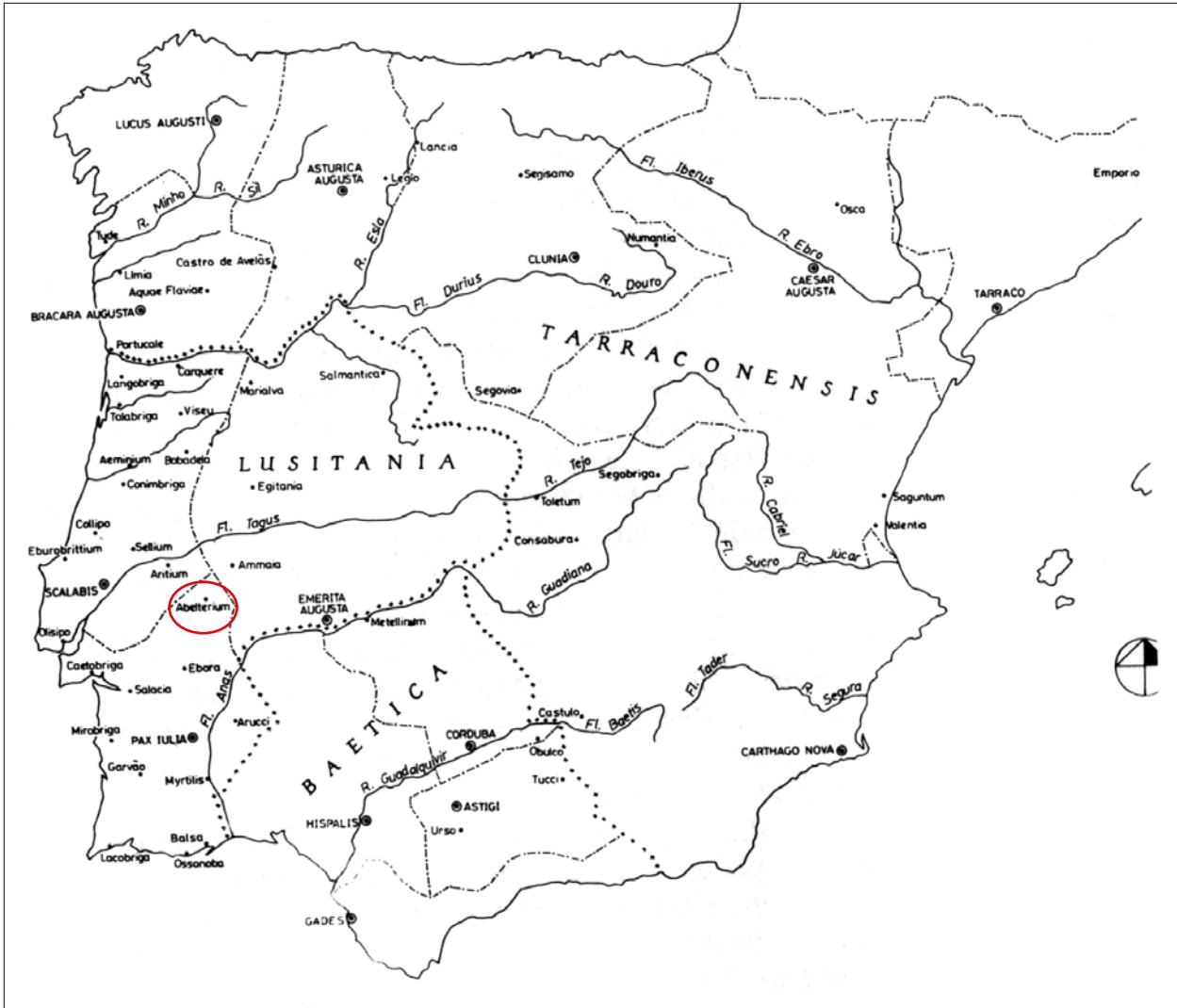


Figure 1
Location of *Abelterium* (Alarcão 1988: 40).

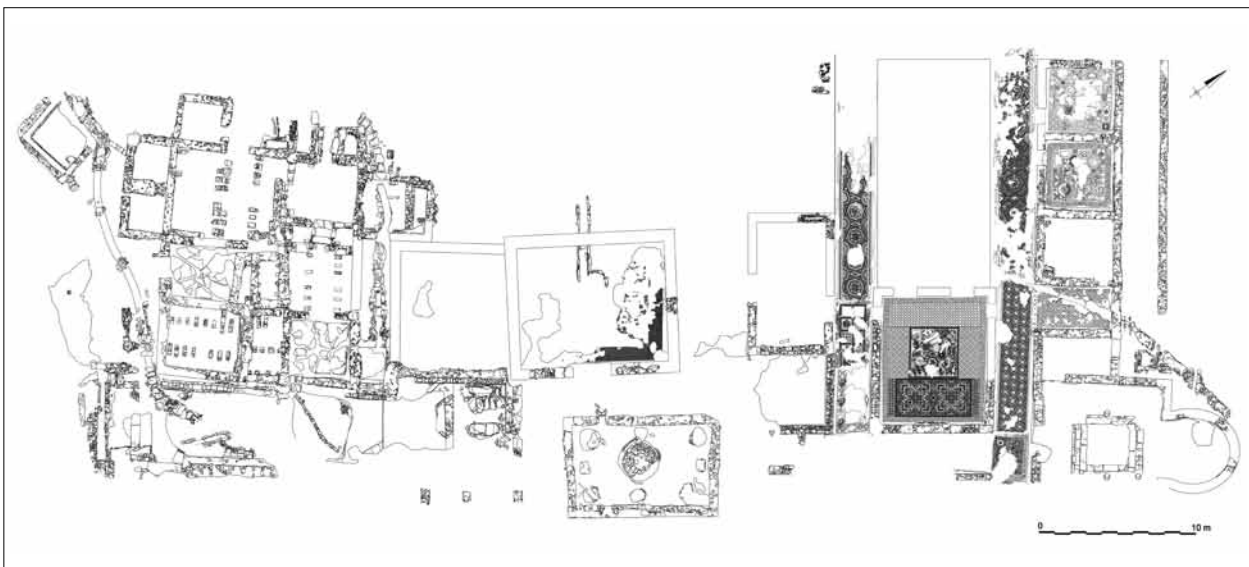


Figure 2
House of the Medusa.

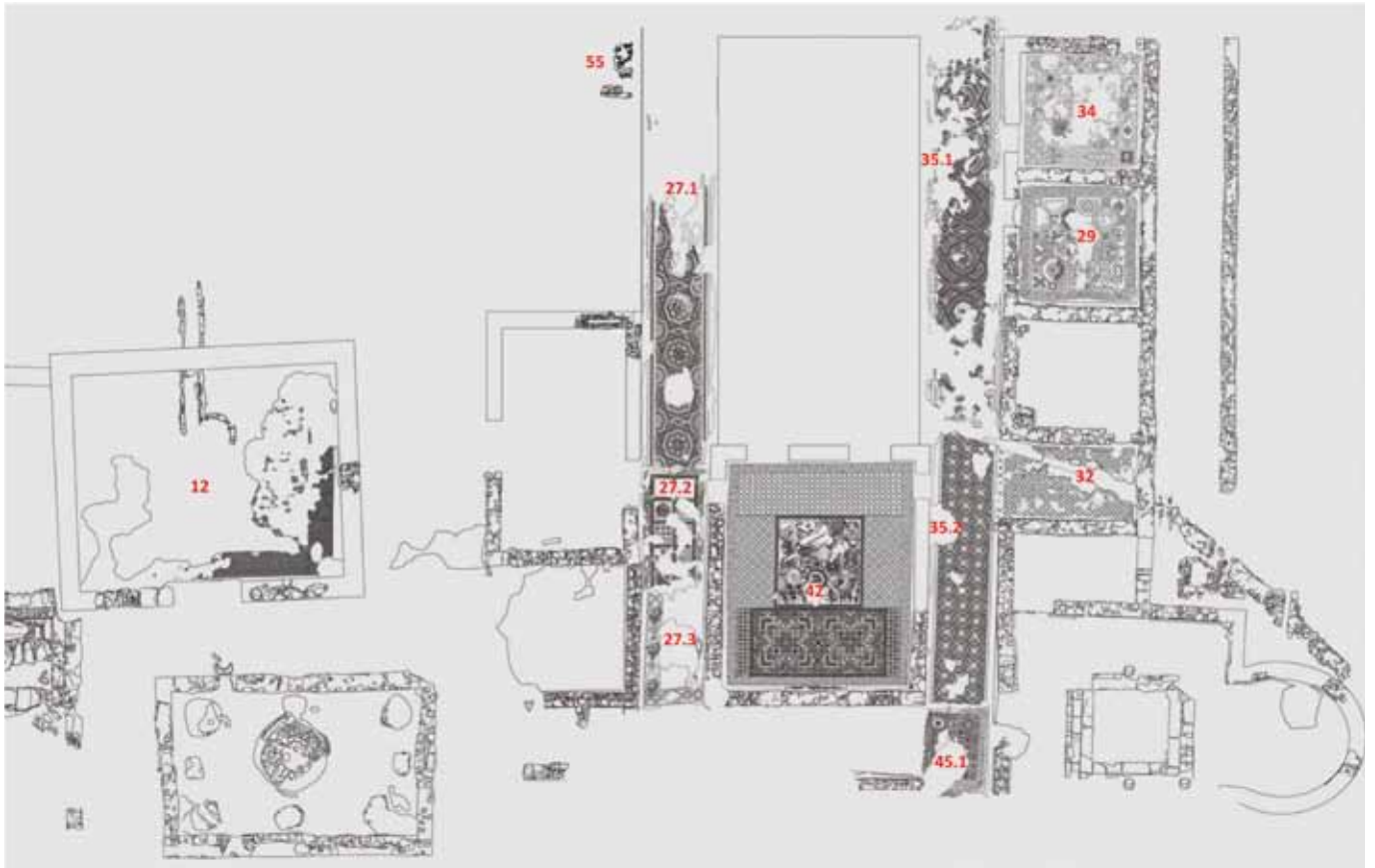


Figure 3
Mosaics of the House
of the Medusa.

Figure 4
House of the Medusa.



Figure 5
House of the Medusa.





Figure 6
House of the Medusa.



Figure 7
House of the Medusa.

2. Casa da Medusa

2.1. Corridors of the *Peristylum*

2.1.1. Corridor 27

Corridor 27 is paved with three rectangular mosaic panels of different lengths, each measuring 2.20 m wide.

The longest *tessellatum* (Fig. 8 – Mosaic 27.1) is framed by a fillet border and a broken meander border, each of these consisting of a single row of blue *tessera*. At the centre, there are several stars formed by two interlaced squares on a white background, touching at two vertices, which consist of simple guilloche outlined in blue, as in the other mosaics uncovered at this house which display this type of guilloche. Horizontal lozenges with truncated octagons on either side are formed at the points of contact between these star shapes. At the centre of one of these octagons (Fig. 9) there is a pelta outlined in blue with a white filling. Another octagon (Fig. 10) has two trifid everted rim chalices, with blue outlines and filled in in yellow and red.

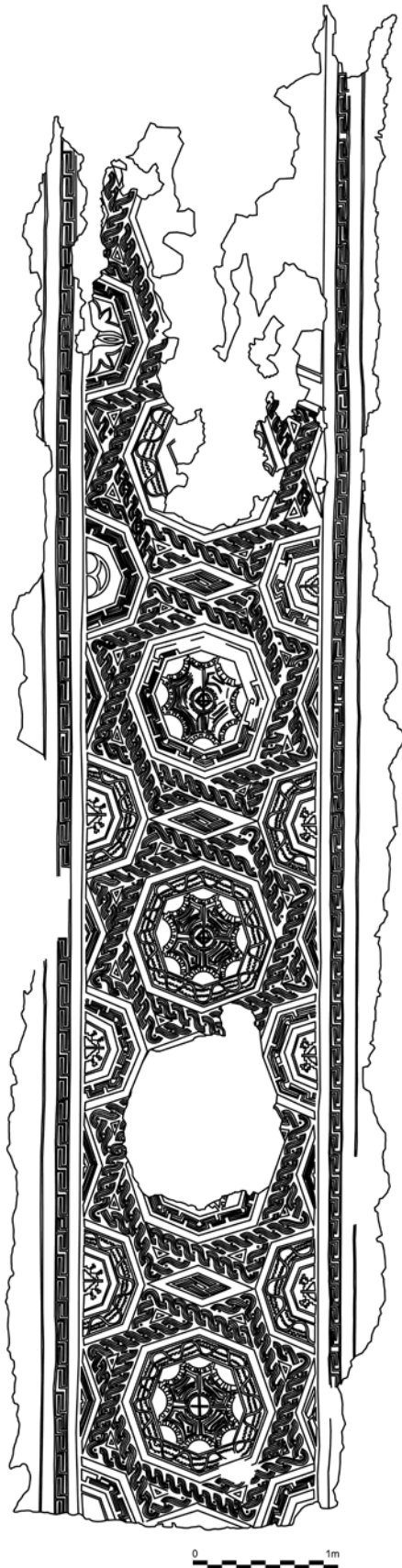


Figure 8
Mosaic 27.1 of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 9
Detail of the mosaic 27.1 of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 10
Detail of the mosaic 27.1 of the House of the Medusa.

At the centre of the star-shaped formation lie concave octagons (Fig. 11), containing rectangular shapes with a cross at the centre. These are set in other regular octagons, which display wave and meander borders alternately.

The *horror vacui* extant in this mosaic and a clear polychrome Baroque overdoing in the intensive filling of the entire panel, using *tesserae* of very homogenous size of five different colours (white, yellow pink, red, blue), suggest that this mosaic was executed in the 3rd-4th century AD.



Figure 11
Detail of the mosaic 27.1
of the House of the Medusa.

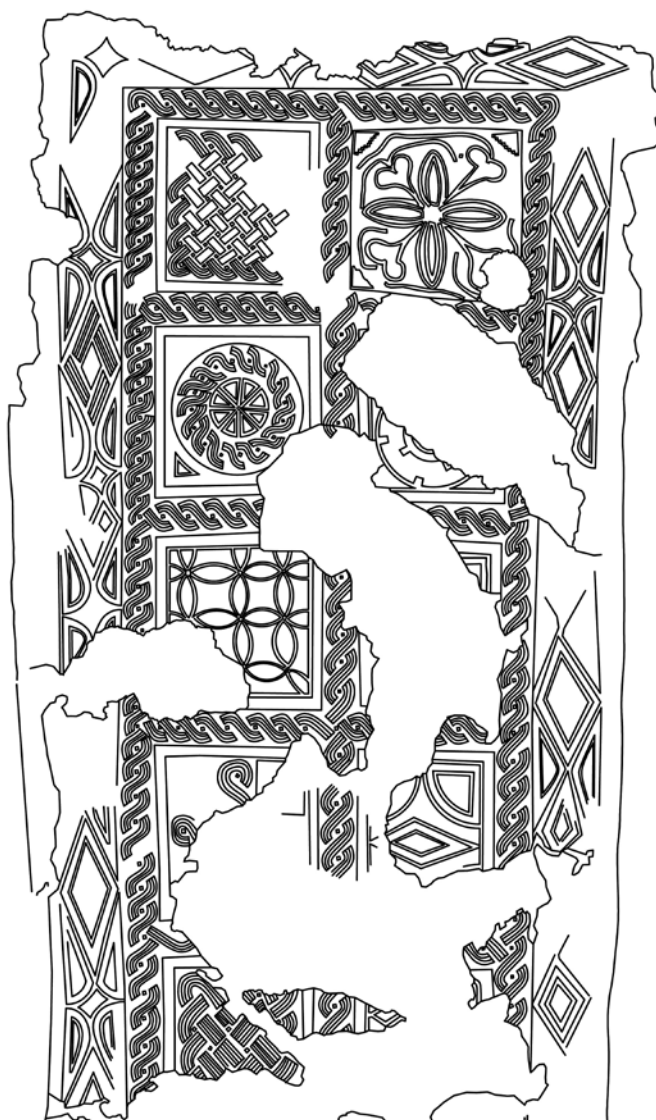


Figure 12
Mosaic 27.2 of the House
of the Medusa.

Identical motifs to these can be found very close to Alter do Chão, more precisely in mosaic n° 10 which paves one of the rooms in the Roman *Villa* of Torre de Palma, in Vaiamonte (Lancha - André 2000: 236-243 pls. LXXXV-LXXXVI).

While the former panel was placed along the Southwest side of the *peristylum* garden, the next two panels, measuring approximately the same size, were placed on the side of the *triclinium* wall.

The second panel (Fig. 12 – Mosaic 27.2), which was executed with the same colours as can be found on the previous panel, is a grid consisting of orthogonal squares (five by two) of simple guilloche, enclosed by a rectangle consisting of a border of crossed bands. These form concave squares, concentric lozenges and hexagons containing lozenges with squares at the centre, placed vertically and horizontally, on a white background. This type of border can also be found in the south of Lusitania, namely in pavements C and I from *Villa* Cardílio (Duran Kremer 2008: 67-69), although with different polychromy and fillings from those uncovered at Casa da Medusa, in Alter do Chão. Other parallels can be found in the mosaic of *cubiculum* 44 of the *villa* of Milreu (Oliveira - Viegas 2011: 724-725, 738).

One of the sequences of the grid contains a multi-strand guilloche: (1); a star consisting of eight blue fillets, surrounded by a single guilloche circular border also with a blue background, set in a square with a white background, with geometric elements on two of the sides (2) (Fig. 13); a composition consisting of circles with four spindles forming concave squares (3) (Fig. 14); a cross with a simple guilloche (4) (Fig. 15); a multi-strand guilloche (5) (Fig. 16). The other sequence contains a floret consisting of eight non-contiguous elements; four of these are fusiform petals with a red filling and four are ivy leaves with a yellow filling and with one or two stems, pointing towards a circle at the centre, in the middle of a two-leaf bouquet (1) (Fig. 17); a circle (2); two horizontal concentric lozenges set in a hexagon with four concave sides, framed by a square which has quadrants on the corners (4) (Fig. 18).



Figure 13
Detail of the mosaic 27.2
of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 14
Detail of the mosaic 27.2 of the
House of the Medusa.



Figure 15
Detail of the mosaic 27.2
of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 16
Detail of the
mosaic 27.2
of the House of
the Medusa.



Figure 18
Detail of the mosaic 27.2
of the House of the Medusa.

Figure 17
Detail of the
mosaic 27.2
of the House of
the Medusa.



Figure 19
Mosaic 27.3 of the House of the Medusa.

Figure 20
Detail of the mosaic 27.3 of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 21
Detail of the mosaic 27.3 of the House of the Medusa.

Some of the motifs represented here, such as the multi-strand guilloche (Oleiro 1992: 55-57 mosaic 1.9 est. 13), can also be found in a panel from the central *peristylum* of the Casa dos Repuxos, in *Conimbriga*, and the composite floret (Oleiro 1992: 37-39 mosaic 1.2 est. 4; 45 mosaic 1.4 ests. 6-9; 48 mosaic 1.6 est. 11; 59 mosaic 1.11 ests. 15-16; 104-109 mosaic 9 est. 37) is also depicted in the Deer Hunt room as well as the *peristylum*. The circles with spindles forming squares described above can also be found in the room of Silenus (Oleiro 1992: 98-103 mosaic 8 est. 36) at *Conimbriga*, although with a distinctive colouring.

The border of the third panel (Figs. 19-21 – Mosaic 27.3) in this corridor, which has been executed in four colours (white, pink, yellow, blue), bears the same motif as displayed on the border of the previous panel, although it also includes circles placed around squares which have crosses at the centre. Inside this border there is a square, a circle containing *peltae* and another circle set in a hexagon, containing other circles.

2.1.2. Corridor 35

Contrary to the corridor on the opposite side, corridor 35 has simply been paved with two rectangular mosaic panels, measuring 2.30 m wide.

The decorative scheme of the first panel (Figs. 22-23 – Mosaic 35.1) in this wing contains crosses consisting of two intertwined *scuta* of simple guilloche, tangent



Figure 23
Detail of the mosaic 35.1 of the House of the Medusa.

at two vertices. The same type of decorative scheme can be found in two wings of the *peristylum* at the *Villa* of Torre de Palma (Lancha - André 2000: 145-156 pls. XLI-XLVIII).

Where the two vertices come into contact, horizontal lozenges are formed which have circles with *chevrons* set in other lozenges. Truncated vertical lozenges with semicircles are placed on either side of these. The star-shaped pattern contains dentilculated concave trapeziums and octagons with a meander border, inside of which there are concave octagons framed by regular octagons, as displayed on the pavement in the opposite wing (27.1).

A more linear decoration is employed in the second panel (Figs. 24-25 – Mosaic 35.2), which contains a composition consisting of tangent four-pointed stars with a square at the centre, forming vertical and horizontal lozenges. The squares are filled in with red rectangles and outlined with a single fillet of blue *tessera* and the stars alternately contain red and yellow triangles. In turn, the lozenges contain other lozenges that are red and yellow in colour. Although this mosaic displays a simplified decorative scheme, using a single shape, the triangle (tip of the star), as its base, its polychrome decoration using four colours (white, yellow, red, blue) is extremely rich when compared to the other mosaics in this house, and it is more open, for example, than panel 27.1, which has a more closed composition.

Lastly, the mosaic is framed by a border consisting of a fillet of blue *tesserae*, followed by a band of five ochre *tesserae*, and then another fillet consisting of two blue *tesserae*. This panel was connected to the wall by a strip of yellow *tesserae*.

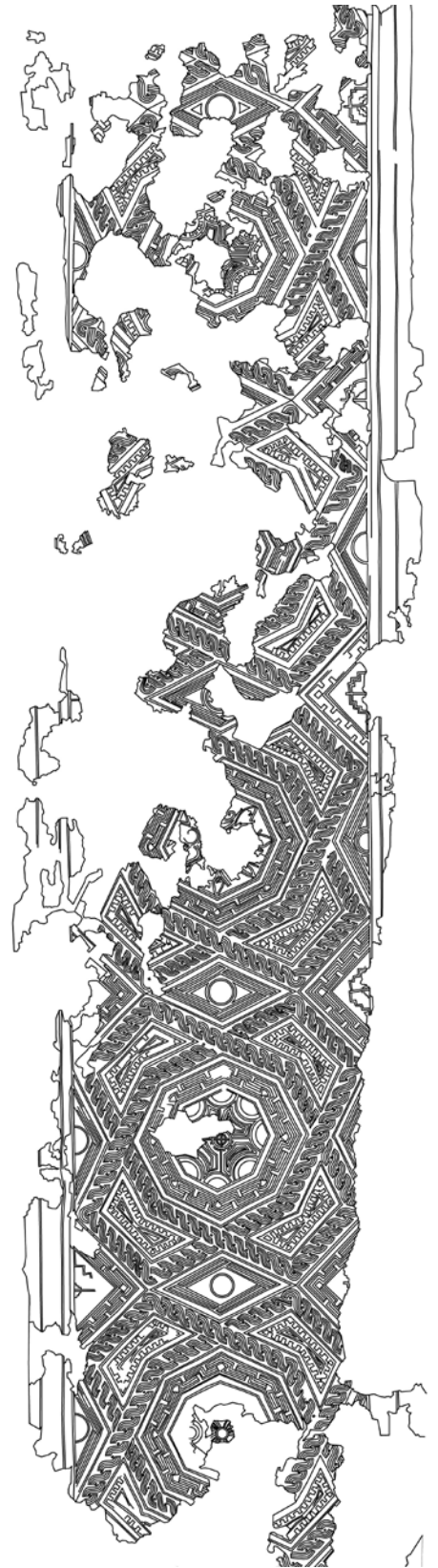


Figure 22
Mosaic 35.1 of the House of the Medusa.

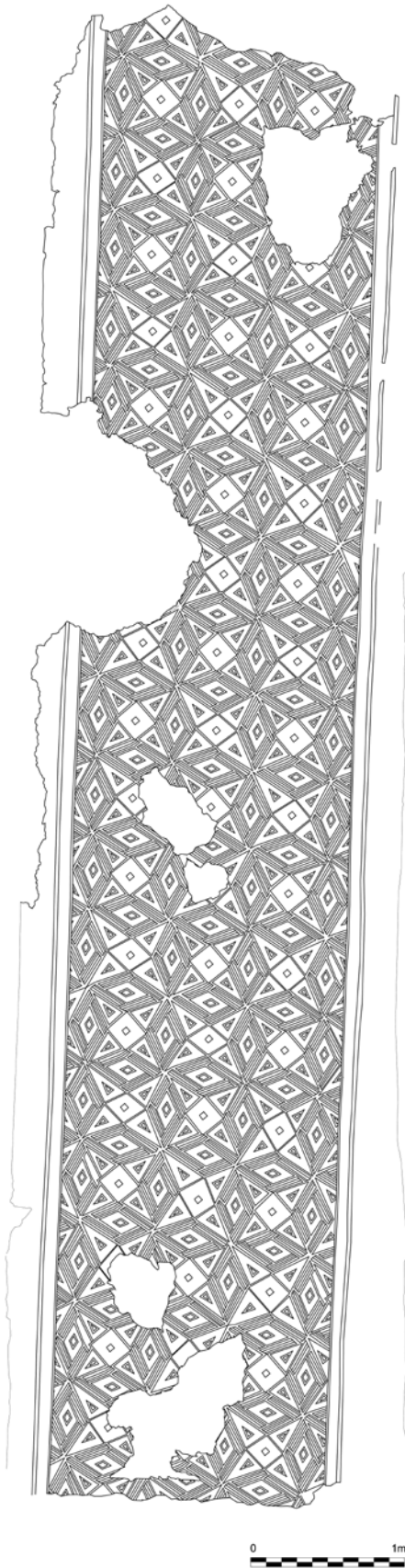


Figure 24
Mosaic 35.2 of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 25
Detail of the mosaic 35.2 of the House of the Medusa.

2.1.3. Corridor 45

Corridor 45, which was partially excavated, contains a rectangular pavement (Figs. 26-27 – Mosaic 45.1) executed in four colours (white, blue, yellow, red), decorated with a rather heterogenous set of motifs, characterised by the alignment (eight by seven) of squares and rectangles, interrupted by octagons and circles. Its outer frame contains secant and tangent semi-circles, forming ogives and scales, made with a double blue fillet on a white background, filled alternately in red and yellow. This was set inside a border formed by a fillet of blue *tesserae*. The same type of motifs as displayed on the frame of this *tessellatum* occur, for example, in mosaic 3 of Rua Arronches Junqueiro (Silva et al. 2011: 305-307), in Setúbal, and in the east wing of the *peristylum* at Milreu (Oliveira - Viegas 2011: 732 e 742 n.º 30), although they are inverted in the latter.

Square shapes outnumber other shapes in this panel, and contain Solomon's knots, concentric circles, concave squares and a quadrilobe with a cross at the centre. The quadrangular and rectangular shapes contain compositions comprising lozenges and triangles. The octagons contain quadrifoliate Solomon's knots, and an octagon with a central square. All these geometric forms are filled with red and yellow *tesserae*. One of the octagons also contains a floret with eight adjacent elements, namely four fusiform petals and four dart-shaped petals, with a circle at the centre. Lastly, the circles have a simple guilloche border with a blue outline, which contains a cross consisting of a blue fillet on a white background.

The Baroque overdoing noted for panel 27.1 is also extant in this mosaic, with a chronology dating from the 3rd century AD onwards.



Figure 26
Mosaic 45.1 of the House
of the Medusa.

Figure 27
Detail of the mosaic 45.1
of the House of the Medusa.

2.2. Rooms

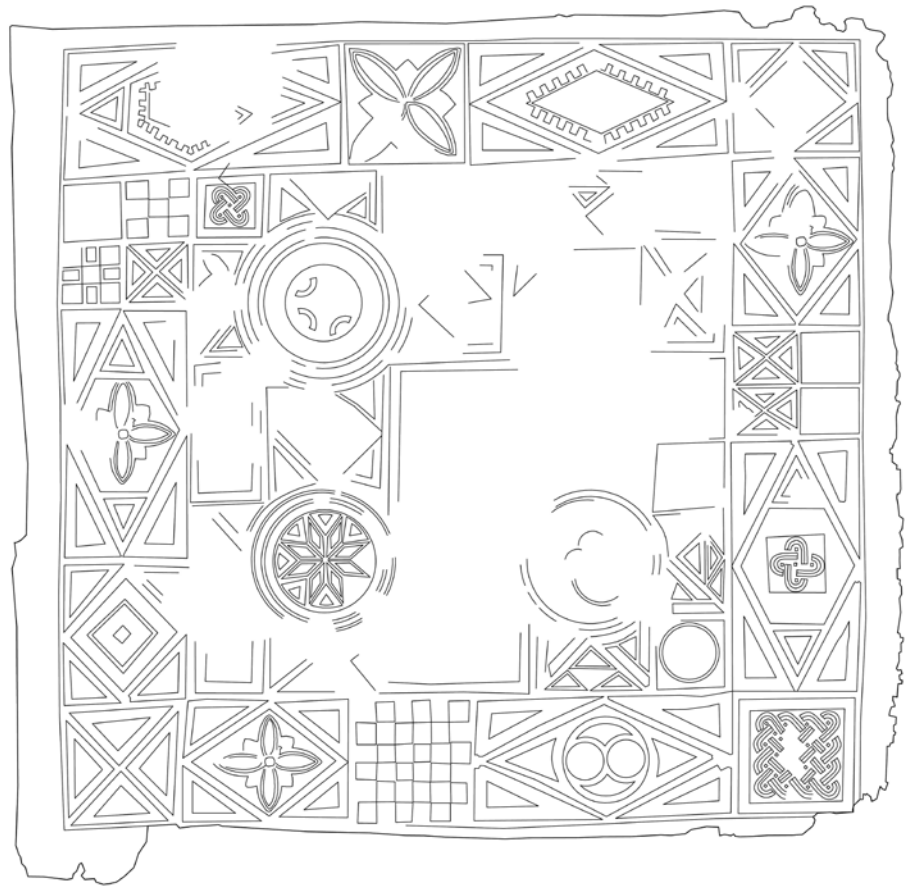
2.2.1. Room 34

Room 34 (Fig. 28 – Mosaic 34) is a quadrangular room located at the top end of the northeast wing, with an internal area measuring around 18 m² (4.40 m x 4.12 m), which has a *tessellatum* with a decorative scheme containing lozenges, squares and rectangles placed around a composition consisting of circles. The lozenges contain Solomon's knots, double pelta motifs, denticulated lozenges and flowers with eight adjacent elements centred on a circle, namely with four fusiform petals and four dart-shaped petals. A denticulated lozenge was also found at the *Villa* of Herdade das Argamassas (Brazuna 2011: 236 fig. 6) in Campo Maior.

Squares with the same type of flowers as above, multi-strand guilloche, a chequerboard pattern, as well as compositions of varied forms have been placed alternately between the lozenges. The centre of the mosaic contains rectangular forms, squares, circles and a Solomon's knot, as well as a series of additional circles which stand out, one of these with an eight-lozenge star, a motif which is also represented in the *triclinium* of the Casa dos Repuxos (Oleiro 1992: 110-116 mosaic 10 ests. 39 e 43).

As in the case of the panel in *cubiculum* 29, this panel has a dense film of calcareous concretions, so that it is difficult to discern clearly the decorative motifs as well as the colour of the *tesserae*. It is only possible to ascertain that white, yellow and red *tesserae* were used.

Figure 28
Mosaic 34 of the House
of the Medusa.



2.2.2. Room 29

The pavement in *cubiculum* 29 (Fig. 29 – Mosaic 29), which also has a quadrangular plan, covering an area of circa 19 m² (4.40 m x 4.33 m), has an outer frame with a decorative scheme that resembles that of panel 45.1.

The panel inside this frame contains a composition consisting of octagons that are sometimes tangent, producing several geometric shapes. Two of these octagons have a simple guilloche border, and one of these has a square at the centre containing a single Solomon's knot. Other octagons contain a rectangle with an astragalus, eventually a quatrefoil shape and a flower consisting of eight non-contiguous elements, namely four fusiform petals and four ivy leaves which have one or two stems, pointing towards a circle placed at the centre. The latter motif was also employed in one of the squares in mosaic 27.2.

The trapeziums contain a square set in a denticulated border, a trilobate motif and *peltae* facing each other. In opposing corners, there are flowers that have a circle at the centre and consist of eight elements, which are adjacent in one case and discontinuous in the other, four with fusiform petals and four with dart-shaped petals. These flowers occur on mosaics 34 and 45.1. Lastly, the squares, which are smaller than the other geometric shapes represented in the pavement, contain circles, Solomon's knots, other squares, one of these being concave, and lozenges.

As observed in the previous pavement, some of the shapes in this pavement are also missing entire lines, suggesting that these mosaics would eventually have been made with ceramic *tesserae*. Despite the degradation of the *tesserae* and the presence of calcareous concretions, the use of at least four colours can be identified, namely white, red, blue and yellow.

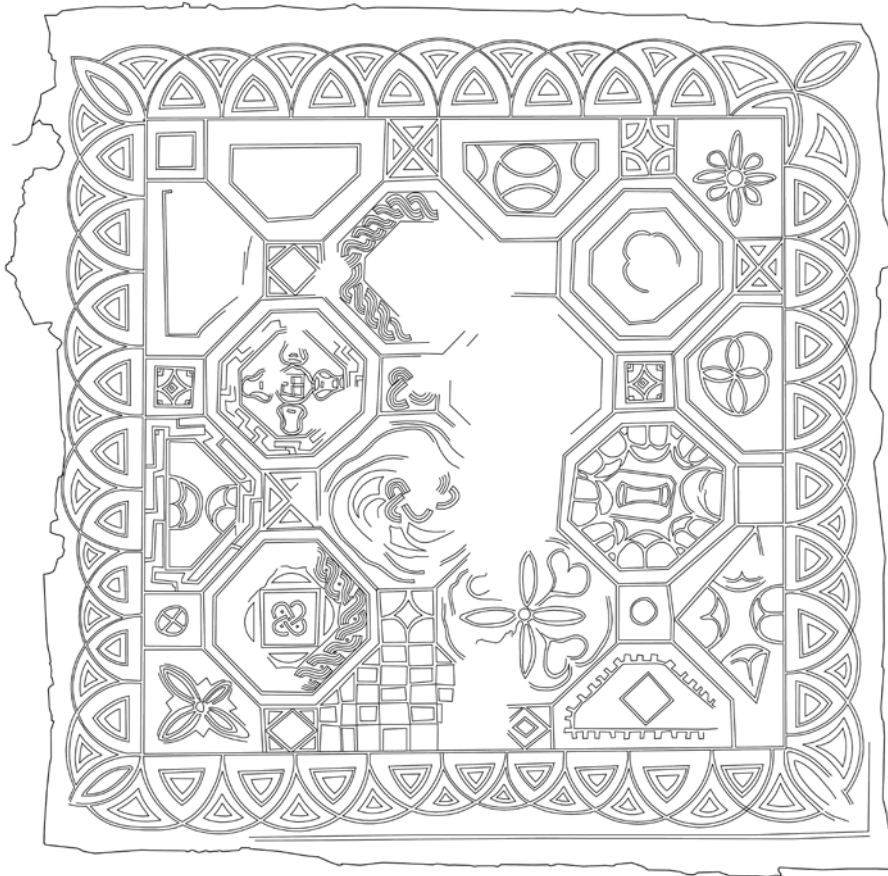


Figure 29
Mosaic 29 of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 30
Mosaic 32 of the House of the Medusa.

2.2.3. Room 32

The vestibule (Figs. 30-31 – Mosaic 32) of *cubiculum* 28 is decorated with an orthogonal pattern consisting of confronted pairs of tangent *peltae*, in alternately upright and recumbent position, executed in three colours (white, blue, grey). They have a dark blue outline and are filled in grey, on a white background. At the entrance, the decorative scheme executed on a white background contains crosses made with a single blue fillet interspersed with small rosettes, also in blue. The remainder of the panel has a denticulated border.

The fact that the *tessellatum* is interrupted on the right side suggests that the original room probably covered the entire area of the annex (31) of the apsed room (37), as the raised *opus signinum* pavement in this room must have been laid over the mosaic. Only future excavation work might confirm this theory. As such, before the architectural restructuring, which may have taken place in the 4th century, this room, which currently has a rectangular plan measuring 13 m² (4.90 m x 2.65 m) and opens onto the corridor of the *peristylum* (35), would have measured approximately twice its current area.

2.2.4. Room 55

In the opposite wing, it is difficult to discern the decorative scheme extant in room 55 (Figs. 32-33 – Mosaic 55) due to the extremely fragmented pavement. However, a composition consisting of circular and quadrangular shapes may be identified. The latter contain Solomon's knots and concave squares. The size of the *tesserae* is extremely homogenous, and four colours were employed, namely white, yellow, red and blue.



Figure 31
Detail of the mosaic 32 of the House of the Medusa.

Figure 32
Detail of the mosaic 55 of the
House of the Medusa.

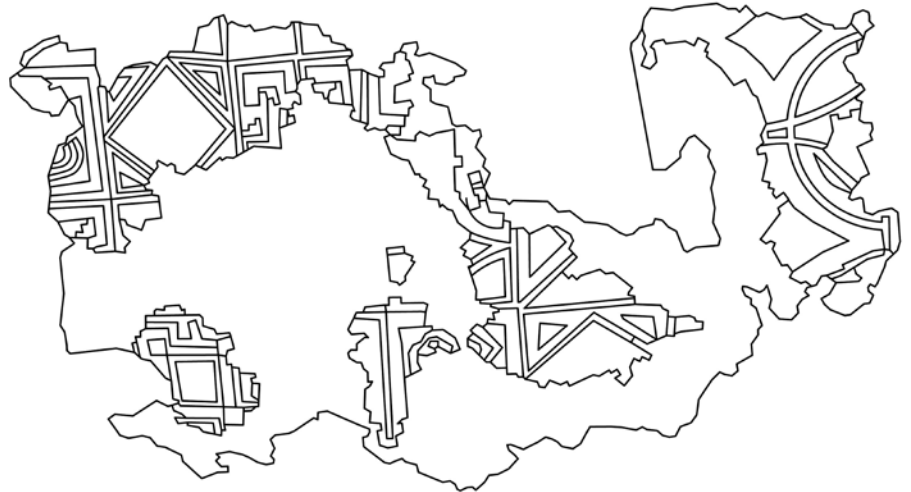


Figure 33
Detail of the mosaic 55 of the
House of the Medusa.



2.3. *Triclinium* (42)

The *tessellatum* that paved this enormous (52,87 m²: 6,60 m x 8,01 m) and monumental performance room (António 2014: 18-19) (Figs. 34-35 – Mosaic 42), includes ten mosaic panels, three in the accesses to the original entrances, four in the T-shaped composition and three in the U-shaped composition. Although the decorative scheme of the *triclinium* stands out mostly due to its striking figurative mosaic (42.7), which corresponds precisely to the vertical trunk of the T of the T+U layout, the horizontal bar of the T is also worthy of note (42.4) due to its intricate and interesting decorative scheme, as well as the meander in perspective.

Six colours (white, ochre, yellow, red, blue and grey) were used in the execution of the geometric panels. The use of several shades provided not only a richer polychromy but also an indisputable aesthetic value.

In terms of their chronology, the dining room panels generally point to a 3rd and 4th century date, which fits perfectly with the date suggested for the figurative scene, namely the first half of the 4th century.

2.3.1. *The Accesses*

Originally, the main entrance for accessing the *triclinium* was located in the middle of wing 45, although there were two narrower secondary doors, for the use of servants, located at the beginning of corridors 27 and 35, that is, at the opposite end of the entrances which were opened at a later date, as shown in Fig. 3.

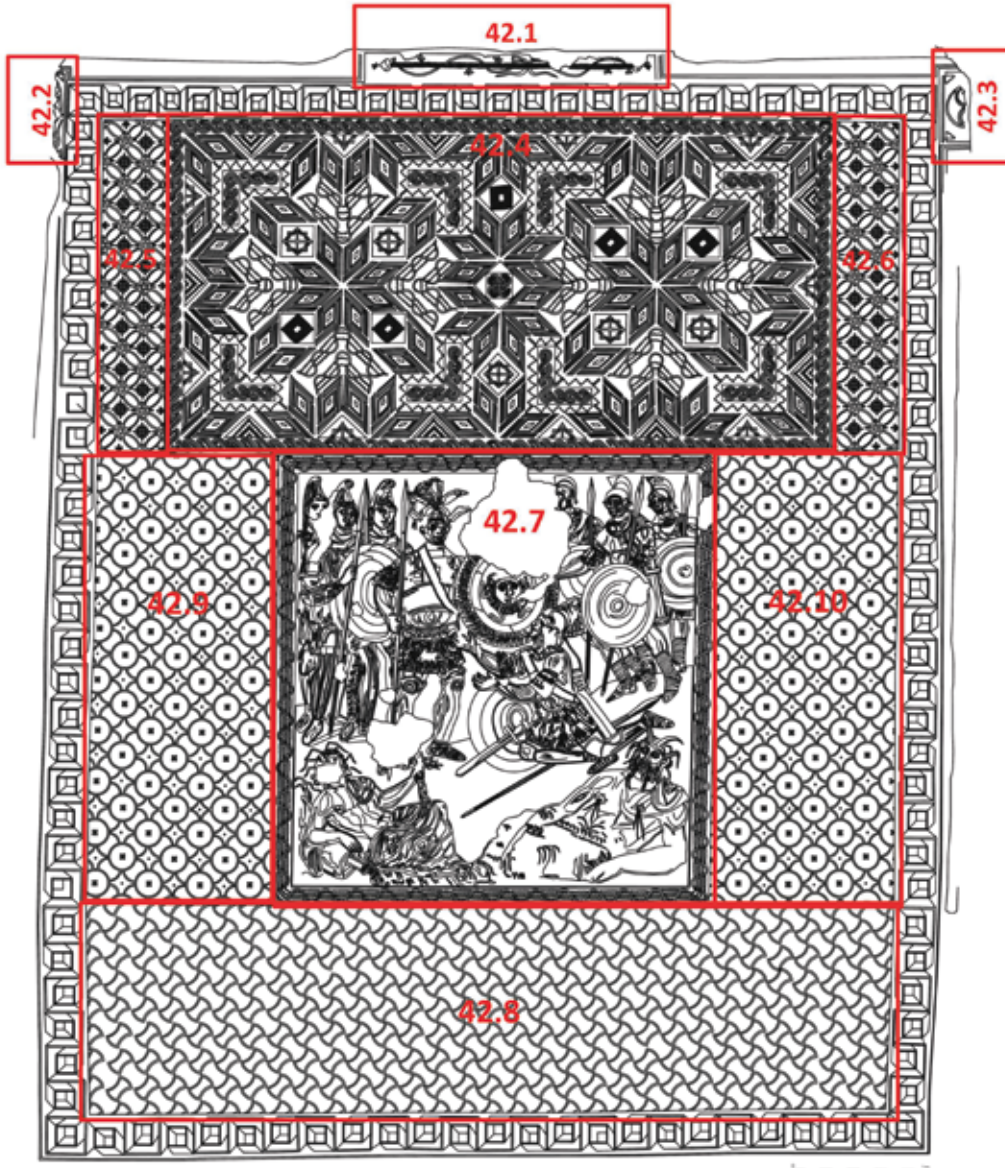


Figure 34
Mosaics of the *triclinium*
of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 35
Triclinium of the House
of the Medusa.



Figure 36
Mosaic 42.1 of the House
of the Medusa.

In order to access the dining room, guests would have crossed panel 42.1 (Fig. 36), which has a representation of the thunderbolt of Zeus, on a white background, contained in a rectangular panel with a double fillet border of blue *tesserae*. This attribute of the most important god of the Greek Pantheon, although centred with the *triclinium* door, is off-centre in relation to the mosaic which covers the entire surface of this room. The thunderbolt was executed with three fillets of *tesserae*, two blue and one grey, and at each end there is a flower made with blue *tesserae* at the base and ochre *tesserae* on the tip. A red strand departs from each tip, alternating with blue and red *chevrons* above and below the bolt. These strands come together at a bow placed off-centre, made with blue and red *tesserae*.

Once again, attention is drawn to parallels between Casa de Medusa and Torre de Palma, since the thunderbolt of Zeus was also identified on a doorsill that connects two rooms at this *villa* located in Vaiamonte (Lancha - André 2000: 225-230 pls. XLI-LXXX). However, while the latter is bichrome and poorly executed, the thunderbolt from Alter do Chão stands out due to its size, careful execution and polychromy (blue, red, grey, ochre). The threshold of the *triclinium* of the Casa dos Repuxos is similarly decorated, although with a plant motif. In this case, this motif was two garlands with laurel leaves, drawn in black and yellow on a white background, without a border (Oleiro 1992: 110-116 mosaic 10 est. 39).

Other panels were uncovered at the secondary entrances, which are also rectangular and have a double fillet border of blue *tesserae*, although they are smaller than the thunderbolt panel. On the panel on the left side (Fig. 37 – Mosaic 42.3) there is a centred blue pelta on a white background, flanked by *chevrons*, while on the opposite side (Fig. 38 – Mosaic 42.2), the mosaic is damaged, so that the



Figure 37
Mosaic 42.3 of the House
of the Medusa.



Figure 38
Mosaic 42.2 of the House
of the Medusa.

motif represented cannot be identified, although it is possible to discern that it would also have been blue on a white background. Beside the latter, the base-board remains around the base of the column that was part of the original door.

Since these panels were found in the interior of the *triclinium* and the original entrances of this room were closed up, it is not known how these mosaics would have been connected to those in each of the respective wings of the *peristylum*. It remains to be seen whether any pavements still lie underneath the walls that have closed up these doorways.

In terms of the entrances that were opened up later, the *triclinium* pavement was connected to the mosaics in the *peristylum* corridors by an *opus signinum* pavement, judging from the remains found in the entrance of wing 27.

2.3.2. *The meander*

The meander (Figs. 34, 37-40) which surrounds the central panels stands out due to its three-dimensionality and polychromy. The walls of this room are connected to the meander by a band of larger ochre *tesserae*, separated by two fillets of single *tessera*, one being light blue and the other white. This meander, delimited by a dark blue double fillet, consists of a denticulated pattern drawn in white and cuboids in perspective also outlined in white. This composition formed two motifs placed alternately, which were created with recourse to lozenges, triangles, trapeziums and squares, employing yellow, ochre, red and two shades of blue.

2.3.3. *T-shaped composition*

The T-shaped composition consists of four panels, three of these corresponding to the horizontal bar and one to the vertical trunk.

The main pavement in the entrance (Fig. 39 – Mosaic 42.4), which corresponds to the largest part of the horizontal bar of the T, has a rectangular plan and is laid out transversally along the shortest side of the room and in association with the original entrances of the *triclinium*. This mosaic contains a very rich and intricate geometric scheme which is surrounded by a simple guilloche border with a blue background. At the centre of this panel, there are two paired compositions consisting of six lozenges, forming a partial star shape. As these compositions



Figure 39
Detail of the mosaic 42.4 of the
House of the Medusa.

touch, this produces an oblique square, which contains another square with a Solomon's knot inside. Above and below these compositions there are truncated eight-pointed stars, touching at two vertices, thereby forming oblique squares, one containing concentric squares and the other an eight-pointed star, which results from two overlapping squares, with a cross at the centre.

At the centre of each of the side sections of this panel, there are eight-lozenged stars flanked by four parallelepiped shapes, containing the same motifs as described above. These are flanked by simple guilloche *chevrons* on a blue background as well as *chevrons* with a double wave band drawn in white, with two types of gradation. Tangent lozenges facing in several directions have been placed around these compositions, forming triangles that contain different motifs.

On either side of the above panel there are two panels of equal size (Fig. 39), characterized by an orthogonal scheme consisting of secant circles made with blue *tesserae*, producing quadrifoliate shapes and concave squares. Where the quadrifoliate shapes touch, circles containing a small white and red floral motif are formed, while the concave squares contain larger flowers, with white, pink, red and blue *tesserae*. The interior of the quadrifoliate shapes is filled alternately in yellow and blue, and contains two parallel fillets consisting of a single row of *tesserae*, placed transversely.

Similarly to Casa de Medusa, two bands of secant circles forming squares also flank the central panel in the horizontal part of the T-shaped composition from the *triclinium* of Casa dos Repuxos (Oleiro 1992: 110-116 mosaic 10 est. 39).

This type of motif can also be found in the mosaic of the Sages (Blázquez Martínez 2005: 731 fig. 7), from *Augusta Emerita*. As previously mentioned, these circles with spindles which form squares have also been uncovered in the room of Silenus (Oleiro 1992: 98-103 mosaic 8 est. 36), in Conimbriga.

Regarding the figurative panel (Figs. 34-35 – Mosaic 42.7), in the scope of the present paper, it is simply important to note that it is framed by a wave band pattern, defined by a fillet of white *tesserae*, with a gradated background, delimited externally by a fillet of blue *tesserae* and internally by a fillet of white *tesserae*.

2.3.4. U-shaped composition

The U-shaped composition consists of three panels, namely mosaics 42.8 to 42.10, characterized, in general, by a simpler and poorer decorative scheme in terms of its polychromy.

The panel which corresponds to the bottom of the U (Fig. 40 – Mosaic 42.8), which is laid out transversally and covers the back end of this room, is decorated with astragalus motifs drawn in white, with an ochre filling. Where these motifs come into contact, larger astragali are formed, which face the opposite direction (crosswise) and are filled with blue *tesserae*.

Flanking the figurative mosaic, the two panels which correspond to the vertical edges of the U (42.9 and Fig. 40 – Mosaic 42.10), are similar in size and their decoration is identical, characterized by an orthogonal scheme consisting of circles and concave squares outlined in white with a blue filling. Where these shapes touch, astragalus motifs are formed, which have an ochre filling and face different directions. It is also worth noting that at the centre of the circles there are crosses consisting of five white *tesserae* and there is a single white *tessera* at the centre of each square. These pavements are separated from the remaining mosaics by a fillet consisting of a single blue *tessera* and from the frame around the entire central mosaic by a fillet consisting of two blue *tesserae*.



Figure 40
Detail of the mosaics 42.8
and 42.10 of the House
of the Medusa.



Figure 41
Detail of the mosaic 12
of the House of the Medusa.

2.4. Baths

The only room (Figs. 41-42 – Mosaic 12) with a mosaic pavement in the bath complex is rather degraded. However, the photograph taken during excavations conducted by Bairrão Oleiro in 1956 (Oleiro 1956: 283-284) (Fig. 43) allows us to make a partial reconstruction of the original geometric motifs.

The frame of the mosaic in this enormous rectangular room, which would eventually have had a *labrum* at the centre (Reis 2014: 22), contains polychrome *chevrons*. One stretch of this mosaic which is laid out along the shortest side of the room breaks up the panel on the longer side of the room. This mosaic has a rich polychromy as five colours are used (white, red, yellow, blue and green). White is the prevailing colour, with marble, limestone and, probably, sandstone *tesserae*.

This frame contained a composition comprising asymmetrical squares decorated with a multi-strand guilloche, of which very little has survived ever since it was discovered.

The multi-strand guilloche can also be found in pavements 27.2 and 34, in the residential area of Casa de Medusa.



Figure 42
Detail of the mosaic 12
of the House of the Medusa.



Figure 43
Detail of the mosaic 12
of the House of the Medusa
(Oleiro 1956: 283-284).

3. Quinta do Pião

3.1. Apse

Four fragments of what remains of the pavement of this enormous room, with an inner area of circa 45m², were found inside an apse which is projected to the Southeast, around which six Late Roman tombs have already been excavated.

One of the fragments (Fig. 44 – Mosaic 1) has geometric motifs set on a white background. The upper part of this mosaic contains a square with a saltire cross, formed by blue squares filled with red squares. The free interstitial spaces are filled with a half guilloche cross in symmetrically opposing colours. This fragment was executed in different shades of red, white, blue and yellow. On the lower part, there is a square which contains a circle with inscribed semicircles, each of these with a spindle filled in blue.

Figure 44
Detail of the mosaic 1
of the *Villa* of Pião.



Figure 45
Detail of the mosaic 2
of the *Villa* of Pião.

On a second fragment (Fig. 45 – Mosaic 2), with a white background, there are two circles which contain a quadrifoliate executed in shades of blue, red, pink and probably white, with four crossing volutes placed between each of the four leaves.

The third fragment of *tesselatum* (Fig. 46 – Mosaic 3) contains geometric motifs executed in blue, red and yellow on a white background. These are outlined by a band consisting of three white *tesserae*, and then a fillet made of two blue *tesserae* and then another band with white *tesserae*.

Lastly, given the poor state of preservation of the fourth fragment of the mosaic (Fig. 47 – Mosaic 4), the exact motifs displayed cannot be identified, although this surely included lozenges and trapeziums, with yellow, blue and white and red, blue and white chords.



Figure 46
Detail of the mosaic 3
of the *Villa* of Pião.



Figure 47
Detail of the mosaic 4
of the *Villa* of Pião.

3.2. Baths

Three patches of the pavement have survived in one of the heated rooms of the baths, which contain floral scrolls made with a single fillet of red *tesserae* with an ivy stem, on a white background, which are also separated by a single fillet of blue *tesserae* and flanked by a double blue fillet followed by a white band. On the right side, there was probably a composition consisting of squares, filled with different geometric motifs, executed in shades of yellow, blue, red and white (Fig. 48).

The remaining fragments, which are small in size and in a poor state of preservation, are decorated with a concentric lozenge with a single blue fillet on a white

Figure 48
Detail of the mosaic 5
of the *Villa* of Pião.



background, which contains an undefined red motif as well as an undefined motif with a single blue and yellow fillet, on a white background.

4. Conclusion

The decorative project of the geometric mosaics from Casa de Medusa and Quinta do Pião is generally characterised by rich polychromy, materials and decorative schemes.

The Baroque overdoing extant in some of the pavements of Casa da Medusa is typical of the Late Imperial period, dated to the 3rd-4th century, a chronology that is coherent with the figurative pavement from the *triclinium*, in which Alexandre the Great is represented, as well as the most emblematic scene from the Battle of Hydaspes. These decorative schemes find parallel in several *villae* and *domus* of *Lusitania*, the province addressed in this paper.

The present study still warrants further detailed research, which will be conducted as soon as the mosaics will have undergone treatment. The latter is essential so that the decorative schemes, the polychromy employed and the materials used as *tesserae* may be examined in greater detail. Future studies will therefore seek to broaden the geographic scope with a view to establishing parallels with other mosaics from different parts of the Empire, as well as understanding the influences that underlie the decorative projects defined by the *dominus*.

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